

Teaching Dossier

Tammo Lossau

Department of Philosophy
Johns Hopkins University

Table of Contents

Teaching Statement.....	2
Summary of Student Evaluations.....	4
Sample Course: Problems with Knowledge, Evidence and Action.....	5
Syllabus.....	5
Student Evaluations.....	10
Numerical Results.....	10
Student Comments.....	10

This is the short version of my teaching dossier.
Original documents and a long version are available at <http://tammolossau.com/td>

Teaching Dossier

Tammo Lossau

Department of Philosophy
Johns Hopkins University

Teaching Statement

Teaching, to me, is the most important and the most rewarding part of working in academic philosophy: it allows me to make a real difference to the way students look at the world, whether they question assumptions of their own thinking, how they respond to opposing views, and to what extent they have the capability and courage to make a case for what they think. Even if philosophy had never made any progress as a discipline, it would be worth keeping a philosophy department around just because engaging with philosophy allows students to grow as thinkers and persons. I focus on that kind of growth in my teaching.

To do so, keeping all students actively engaged is key. I usually begin the semester by writing a controversial thesis on the board – such as “Stones and trees have souls just like humans and animals do.” I then ask students to argue for or against that claim with their neighbor, which makes sure that everyone gets used to talking in class. Throughout the semester, I use a “debating club” format in which students are split up in teams to prepare making the case for some philosophical position. I find it especially useful to have students prepare a case for a position that is different from what they really think, because this often leads them to look at the same issue from a different angle. Formats like this also take the pressure of some students, who may be reluctant to contribute to a discussion if they feel uncertain about what position they ultimately agree with.

When I lecture, I like to keep it short and focus on supplying context for the readings, clarifying the main thesis of the reading and sometimes picking up on especially different passages. I then choose discussion questions that allow students to draw from the readings and be able to contribute things that were in the reading, but not in the lecture. Setting up discussions this way rewards students who have done the reading thoroughly and naturally leads to a more philosophical exchange. During the pandemic, half of my classes were synchronous forum discussions, combined with a taped half-hour lecture. This format worked extremely well: even though students were only required to post once, most of them left about 5 posts, and several students told me that those discussions were one of the highlights of their (academic) week. Because these discussions allowed for better structure and led to contributions even from the more introverted or less confident students, I want to maintain this as a tool for in-person teaching.

Perhaps the most important skill to take away from a philosophy course is the ability to make a careful and sophisticated argument for a position. Because of that, papers are the most important kind of formative assessment and (except for logic classes) deserve to be the main assignment. However, to help students succeed at this I find it useful to supplement these with assignments that help students prepare for such a paper. In my course on philosophy of religion, I split students up into “workshop groups” in which they were asked to peer-review proposals for their papers and give presentations on a paper not on the syllabus they read in preparation for their paper. Combined with feedback from me on their proposals and draft, this greatly improved the quality of the papers, and more importantly often gave students confidence to go about a project that does not just amount to defending or criticizing a class reading.

Formats like workshop groups that stretch throughout the semester, not-quite-serious debating clubs, or “live” online discussions have also helped me foster an inclusive environment in my classes. Under such conditions, it is easier for students to feel that their own perspective is as valid as that of their classmates, which in turn will help the class itself. The experience that has brought this point out clearest for me have been my classes on the philosophy of religion. During this Fall semester, I am teaching a historically oriented class on philosophy of religion at Ashoka, and I have taught a similar class at Johns Hopkins. Both of these classes benefit greatly from the diversity in student’s backgrounds. I structured these classes around the question “what is religion?”, which (contrary to a course that focuses on the question “does God exist?”) allowed for the inclusion of non-Western thinkers on the syllabus – I presented a poster as part of the Teaching Hub at the Eastern APA’s conference in January 2022. As students became comfortable with the class, they began to share their own views, grounded in their personal experience, about what was essential to religion, which we were able to apply, for example, to the contrast between Matthew Tindal’s rationalist picture and Friedrich Schleiermacher’s view that religion is a feeling. That sort of safe environment also led to a willingness to engage with views completely contrary to their own: the more religious students could debate the Marxist arguments for religion being an obstacle to progress, and the atheists could debate Swami Vivekananda’s ideas about religious experience.

While at Ashoka, I am teaching two classes per semester, including an introductory lecture. At Johns Hopkins, I have self-taught six courses, and I have worked as a teaching assistant in over a dozen courses, both at Hopkins and in Göttingen. Over the course of that time, I have always strived to improve, which is why I completed the Johns Hopkins Teaching Academy over the 2019/2020 academic year. In 2020 I was also a finalist for the Excellence in Teaching Awards at the Krieger School for Arts and Sciences. Teaching has always felt like the part of my work that makes a real difference and that I can be proud of, and I therefore see it at the heart of my academic activities.

Summary of Student Evaluations

COURSES TAUGHT AT ASHOKA

Overall, the quality of the course was good.

(1=Strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

<i>Course</i>	<i>Semester</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Course Quality</i>
Symbolic Logic	Spring 2023		tbd
Foundations Course Mind & Behavior	Spring 2023		tbd
Philosophy of Religion: Historical Perspectives	Fall 2022	4	5.00
Foundations Course Mind & Behavior	Fall 2022	29	4.07

COURSES TAUGHT AS PRIMARY INSTRUCTOR AT JOHNS HOPKINS

Overall course quality

(1=Poor, 2=Weak, 3=satisfactory, 4=Good, 5=Excellent)

<i>Course</i>	<i>Semester</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Course Quality</i>
Problems with Knowledge, Evidence, and Action	Spring 2022	15	4.87
Themes from the Philosophy of Religion	Fall 2020	15	4.67
Do we have souls? If so, what are they?	Winter 2020	7	4.57
Wittgenstein and the Limits of Our World	Winter 2019	6	4.83
Belief in God	Winter 2018	21	3.86
Philosophical Intuitions	Summer 2017	3	4.00

Sample Course: Problems with Knowledge, Evidence and Action

Syllabus

Course Description

This course covers a selection of recent work in epistemology and serves as an introduction to these topics. Issues to be discussed include new approaches to the nature of knowledge and skepticism, normative aspects of the way we handle information in our decision-making, epistemic injustices, and epistemic requirements for democratic discourse.

Course Objectives

The primary goal of this course is to provide students the background they need to access the contemporary literature on epistemology, and to develop an understanding of the different approaches to the topics being discussed. More broadly, this will also help building several reasoning and expression skills in general: engaging with complex readings and closely analyzing them will improve your ability to read carefully and attend to detail as well as to weigh the different readings. Critical assessment of the arguments expressed in those readings will allow you to learn thinking and expressing yourself clearly and precisely both in conversation and in writing.

Student Assessment

Grading for this course consists of three components:

- Three essays (60% total)
- Four preliminary writing assignments (20% total)
- Class participation (20%)

The essays are the most significant part of your grade, because the skills that can be acquired while writing them are the most valuable thing you can take away from this course (or most other philosophy courses). A list of two or three topics for the essays will be given out at least three weeks prior to their due date (four weeks for essay 1, but a draft will be due two weeks before the final due date). You must choose exactly one of these topics – if you have an idea for a different topic, please clear this with me before you start writing. The topics will become more liberal as the semester progresses.

The essays have different lengths and will contribute to your overall grade to different extents:

- Essay 1: about 4 pages, will count 15% of your final grade.
- Essay 2 OR course project: about 5 pages, will count 20% of your final grade.
- Essay 3: about 7 pages, will count 25% of your final grade.

I will circulate a longer document with more specific guidelines and tips for writing those essays. I also encourage you to talk to me while you are in the early stages of writing your paper. The secret to writing a good paper, however, is this: start writing early, so you have time to sleep over your ideas.

Given the writing-intensive listing of this course, you will be allowed to submit at least one draft of a paper. To facilitate this, one of the preliminary writing

assignments will be a draft of the first paper, to be submitted 1.5 weeks before the due date of that paper (see schedule). I will grade these papers informally as drafts, meaning that they will not be held to the same standard as the paper itself. (Note that this means that an A for the draft does not mean that your paper will receive an A as well.) You have the option of submitting drafts or paper outlines for the remaining papers as well, but these are not mandatory and are not graded. If you plan on doing so, please submit those drafts at least one week ahead of the deadline, giving me time to read them, to give you feedback, and for you to make revisions.

You have the option of substituting essay 2 with a course project. You can come up with your own idea for a project like this, but you will need to agree with me on the setup. I will also provide some examples of project setups. One such example: limit your news intake to one outlet (e.g. one daily cable news show) for a week and write down what you took to be the main news items over that week. Then compare your list with a partner who was limited to a different news outlet. You will need to write a 5-page report on your project, which should include the immediate results, but should also include at least 2 pages of philosophical analysis, and the analysis should make reference to at least one course reading. The deadline for the report is the same as for the regular paper, so make sure you plan the timeline for your project well in advance.

For papers 2 and 3, you will be assigned to a “workshop group” and will share ideas for those papers within that group, present on a reading for paper 3, and give each other feedback. I will reserve a part of class time for the meetings of these groups.

The preliminary writing assignments are as follows (each is worth 5% of your overall course grade):

- A draft of the first paper (as outlined above)
- A short presentation of the structure of your second paper or the plan for your course project to your workshop group (submit 1-page handout to me)
- A peer review report on the presentations given in your workshop group (submit to me and to presenters)
- A short presentation on a reading you did in preparation for the third paper to your workshop group (submit 1-page handout to me)

Finally, your class participation will be part of your grade. There are two aspects to this grade:

- Once a week, submit an online comment in response to the discussion questions I will post on MS Teams (worth 10% of your overall grade). These comments need to be submitted by 7pm on Monday (even if they are concerned with a reading assigned for a Thursday). You don't need to submit these comments for the first week of class. You can miss one of these comments without an excuse, every further missed comment will result in a penalty on this part of your grade.
- Your in-class participation will be worth 10% of your overall grade. This is mainly about being active (including in group work) and engaging with others, less about quality or quantity of your contributions to in-class discussions. If you do the readings, show up, and are willing to talk, your grade should be good.

All grades will be calculated as percentages. At the end of the semester, I will convert your overall percentage into a letter grade, using the following scale: A+ beginning at 97, A beginning at 93, A- beginning at 90, B+ beginning at 87, B beginning at 83, etc. If you are very close to a better grade, I will consider rounding your score up.

Course Policies

Attendance is required. You can miss up to 3 classes without any penalty (and you don't have to send me an apology). Beyond that, you can only miss classes with a valid excuse. If you miss more than 3 classes without a valid excuse, there will be a penalty on your participation grade. Arriving more than 15 minutes late to class counts as an absence. (If you have a letter from the disability office that exempts you from attendance requirements, you can ignore this paragraph.)

Late assignments: assignments are always due at midnight at the end of the day specified on the course schedule. I will allow a "grace period" until 4am, but after that the assignment counts as late. For every day an assignment is late, there will be a deduction of 5% from the grade of that essay. However, if the assignment is late more than 5 days, it will simply be graded 0%. If you have received a homework assignment, the daily deduction is 10%, the 5-day rule applies in the same way.

Research demonstrates that classes in which students are not allowed to use laptops and smartphones have far better learning outcomes. For that reason, using laptops, smartphones, etc. is not allowed in class. The only exceptions to this policy are e-readers which do not have a browser function and students with disability accommodations that allow them to use electronics.

We will comply with Covid-19 related university policies. Currently, this means that you need to wear a properly fitted mask (covering your mouth and nose) during class, except when drinking. It also means that you will need to stay home for a period if you are symptomatic or tested positive. I will make accommodations and will make remote attendance available. If a large number of people cannot attend in person (but feel well enough to attend remotely), or if I cannot attend, we will move the class online until the in-person format makes sense again.

Disability Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability or believe that you might have a disability that requires special accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services to obtain a letter from a specialist: Garland 385; (410) 516 4720; studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu. The terms of these letters will be honored. (Please make sure I actually received the letter. If I did not write you a quick email acknowledging that I got it, I probably did not get it.)

Academic Integrity

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of students and/or the chairman of the Ethics Board beforehand. See the guide on "Academic Ethics for Undergraduates" at <https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/policies-guidelines/undergrad-ethics/> for more information.

Course Schedule

Detailed references are at the end of this syllabus.

Day	Topic	Readings	Notes
Jan 25	Introduction		
I. Skepticism <i>What kind of access do we have to facts about the world we live in? How can the problem of skepticism be addressed?</i>			
Jan 27	Skeptical Problems	Williams	
Feb 1	Externalism about Evidence	Bonjour	
Feb 3	Internalism about Evidence	Madison	
II. Epistemic Normativity <i>What are the normative implications of how well-informed we are? When do we have the right to assert something, believe something, or act on an assumption?</i>			
Feb 8	Norms of Assertion	Williamson (read only to end of sec. 2, p. 508)	paper 1 assigned
Feb 10	Norms of Assertion	Kelp & Simion	
Feb 15	Epistemic Norms of Action	Hawthorne & Stanley	
Feb 17	Epistemic Norms of Action	Neta	Paper 1 draft due
Feb 22	Epistemic Norms of Belief	Rinard	
Feb 24	Review Session		
III. Social Epistemology <i>Can two reasonable people with the same access to evidence disagree? What forms of epistemic injustice are there, and how can they be rectified?</i>			
Mar 1	Peer Disagreement	Christensen	paper 1 due
Mar 3	Peer Disagreement	Hawthorne & Srinivasan	
Mar 8	Testimonial Injustice	Fricker, Introduction and ch. 1 (pp. 1-29)	
Mar 10	Testimonial Injustice		paper 2/ project assigned
Mar 15	Hermeneutical Injustice	Fricker, ch. 7	
Mar 17	Review Session		Presentation session 1
Mar 21-25	<i>Spring Break – no class</i>		
IV. Epistemology and Democracy <i>How should democratic discourse be organized to allow for beneficial decisions? What role does empathy play? In what ways is diversity important?</i>			
Mar 29	Political Epistemology	Hannon & Edenberg	Presentation session 2
Mar 31	The Epistemology of Democracy	Anderson	Peer reviews due
Apr 5	Empathy	Steinberg	
Apr 7	Epistemic Effects of Diversity	O'Connor & Bruner	paper 2/ project report due
Apr 12	Rational Public Discourse	Habermas	
Apr 15	Review Session		
V. Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories			

<i>How Do Conspiracy Theories arise and what exactly is problematic about them? Are they similar to propaganda?</i>			
Apr 19	Vice Epistemology	Cassam	
Apr 21	Conspiracy Theories	Hawley	final paper topics due
Apr 26	Propaganda	Stanley	
Apr 28	Review Session		
May 10			final paper due

Readings

Here are the full citations of the readings, listed in the order of the course schedule. All readings are available on MS Teams.

- Williams, Michael (2000). Problems of Knowledge. Oxford University Press. – Chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 58-80).
- BonJour, Laurence (1980). Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, 53-73.
- Madison, B.J.C. (2010). Epistemic Internalism. *Philosophy Compass* 5, 840-853.
- Williamson, Timothy (1996). Knowing and Asserting. *The Philosophical Review* 105: 489-523.
- Kelp, Christoph and Mona Simion (forthcoming). A Social Epistemology of Assertion. In Jennifer Lackey and Aidan McGlynn (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Social Epistemology*. Oxford University Press.
- Hawthorne, John and Jason Stanley (2008). Knowledge and Action. *Journal of Philosophy* 105: 571-590.
- Neta, Ram (2009). Treating Something as a Reason for Action. *Noûs* 41:594-626.
- Rinard, Susanna (2017). No Exception for Belief. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 94: 121-143.
- Christensen, David (2007). Epistemology of disagreement: The good news. *Philosophical Review* 116: 187-217.
- Hawthorne, John and Amia Srinivasan (2013). Disagreement Without Transparency: Some Bleak Thoughts. In David Christensen and Jennifer Lackey (eds.), *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays* (pp. 9-30). Oxford University Press.
- Fricker, Miranda (2007). *Epistemic Injustice*. Oxford University Press.
- Hannon, Michael, and Elizabeth Edenberg (forthcoming). A Guide to Political Epistemology. In Jennifer Lackey & Aidan McGlynn (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Social Epistemology*. Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, Elizabeth (2006). The Epistemology of Democracy. *Episteme* 3, 8-22.
- Steinberg, Justin (2014). An Epistemic Case for Empathy. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 95, 47-71.
- O'Connor, Cailin & Justin Bruner (2019). Dynamics and Diversity in Epistemic Communities. *Erkenntnis* 84, 101-119.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1984). *The Theory of communicative action. Vol. I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, T. McCarthy (trans.). Boston: Beacon. [Ch. 1, section C]
- Cassam, Quassim (2016). Vice Epistemology. *The Monist* 99, 159-180.
- Hawley, Katherine (2019). Conspiracy theories, impostor syndrome, and distrust. *Philosophical Studies* 176, 969-980.
- Stanley, Jason (2015). *How Propaganda Works*. Princeton University Press. [Ch. 3]

Student Evaluations

NUMERICAL RESULTS

<i>Question</i>	<i>Course Mean (N=15)</i>	<i>School Mean</i>	<i>Department Mean</i>
<i>5: excellent – 1: poor</i>			
The overall quality of this course is:	4.87	4.19	4.24
The instructor's teaching effectiveness is:	4.87	4.23	4.25
The intellectual challenge of this course is:	4.73	4.27	4.34
Feedback on my work for this course is useful: (5: agree strongly – 1: disagree strongly):	5.00	4.04	4.27
Compared to other Hopkins courses at this level, the workload for this course is: (5: much heavier – 1: much lighter)	2.93	3.14	3.08

STUDENT COMMENTS

What are the best aspects of this course?

- The course did not have a heavy homework load. Instead, the classes were discussion based and structured around a couple of readings we would do over the weekend and the discussion responses we posted. The readings were challenging, but the professor did an amazing job of helping all the students understand the content through engaging lectures and activities. Additionally, the class was on the smaller side, so I felt like I knew everyone in the class on a first name basis even though there were a variety of grade levels and majors. The essays were also open ended enough that we could explore sections of the course that we enjoy and the professor was extremely helpful in terms of feedback.
- Instructor uses a wide variety of teaching techniques&tools, including some online tools I've never seen other instructors use but are very efficient.
- discussions were great; prof was very willing to discuss ideas
- This class is a small class, so there is a lot of engagement with the instructor and with the classmates.
- I really appreciate how Tammo pays attention to every student's comments and discussion. I also like the way he gives feedback on outlines and papers, which are very reasonable, detailed, and helpful.
- the discussion and classes really do provide engaging and interesting viewpoints and concepts on the philosophy of knowledge
- Amazing discussion sections where we could really tackle the material we read for homework. All of the class was engaged, people were always speaking etc.

- The best aspects of this course were the think tanks we did at the end of every unit, as I thought they were very engaging and an effective way to wrap up all the topics discussed in that unit. In general, I thought all the readings and discussions were really interesting and fun to discuss.
- The in-class discussions.
- The discussions on texts read in class, as well as group activities were very helpful in reinforcing knowledge. The workload was bearable, and the instructor did a great job at explaining complex concepts.
- The best aspects of this course include Tammo's teaching. He came to every class energetic and really cared about engaging every student in the class. He wove a tightly-knit community among the students in the class as well. The environment in the classroom was always welcoming.
- Tammo is an excellent instructor. His thorough feedback on writing assignments is extremely helpful. I also really liked the active learning component, with weekly readings and discussion posts pertaining the material. This aspect helped increase comprehension of the topics discussed before lectures, with lectures and class discussions helping to solidify the information. The flexibility in topics for both the discussion posts and the papers was very nice as well.
- The professor is very understanding and willing to help!

What are the worst aspects of this course?

- Literally nothing. This is my favorite class at Hopkins so far to be honest.
- some of the earlier topics regarding internalism v. externalism was difficult, particularly for those with no philosophy background
- N/A
- LOTS of reading
- sometimes Tammo would lecture for too long which could get boring as more discussion is always more entertaining
- The only aspect of this course I didn't like was how early it is, but that has nothing to do with the course itself.
- The readings.
- Some assigned texts were quite difficult compared to others, as well as longer.
- A lot of students dropped the class, so the class size shrunk significantly.
- Sometimes, the lecture would repeat a lot of what we read!

What would most improve this class?

- Maybe more interactive activities and games, but I do think there was a good balance in the class. Some readings were very time consuming and hard to comprehend
- don't rush through internalism v. externalism
- N/A
- 9am class time
- not much. maybe a little more discussions and engaging exercises.
- One thing that could improve this class is having more discussions in smaller groups to switch up the format occasionally.
- Lighter, more applicable/ understandable readings.
- I would add more time for group activities.

- A stricter attendance policy would most improve this class because many students arrived late on many occasions.
- More free-form discussion!

What should prospective students know about this course before enrolling? (You may comment on any aspect of this course such as assumed background, readings, grading systems, and so on.)

- There is no assumed background in philosophy or epistemology. Professor Tammo is very understanding and is such an engaging professor. Be prepared to share your opinions in your class because you will be required to discuss your discussion post with the class (so speak at least once per week). However, there is no judgement from the professor or other students and the environment was very supportive even if your argument isn't full developed.
- good bit of reading that may be difficult to understand after 10 pages
- There is no background required. There are two readings a week to discuss in class. The grading system is regular with a 93 being an A, and there are 3 papers, a couple of presentations, and there is a participation grade.
- Do as much as the reading as possible and use the discussion board and others responses to fill in any gaps
- There is a lot of writing and discussion involved so definitely be prepared for that.
- A background in philosophy is not necessary at all, as many of the readings are very clear and accessible. There are a few more technical papers, but the instructor explains them well and supplements them during lecture. It is a fairly reading heavy course, but the material is very interesting.
- The readings can be quite difficult but the course content is very interesting and although some of the philosophical papers make the topics seem distant or not as attainable for the average person, there is still a lot of relevance to your own life.
- Prospective students should know that you don't need any background in philosophy to be able to get a good grasp of the concepts. The class is reading-intensive.
- This course is excellent for all students at Hopkins, whether they have prior philosophy experience or not. The instructor is kind and thoughtful, and feedback both in-class and online is responsive and helpful. Tammo is approachable and always there to help all the students.
- This is a typical philosophy class. Stay on top of readings to be engaged.